

Freitas Pulls A Duran, Diaz Bulls Way To Win

Written by Michael Woods
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Juan Diaz doesn't personify the body beautiful athlete carved from granite, his form may not be picture perfect, he has love handles that Joe Blow can identify with. But his desire to compete and excel is unparalleled in the sport today, and those traits carried the 23-year-old Texan to a TKO win over Acelino Freitas in a Boxing After Dark card from Foxwoods Casino in Mashantucket, CT.

The end, of the fight, and quite likely, Freitas' career, came with the Brazilian sitting on his stool after an eighth round that saw him in dire straits. The 31-year-old vet told his trainer that he didn't want to continue, and Diaz retained his WBA lightweight crown, while picking up the WBO's version from Freitas.

This was the second loss for Freitas, and the second time he announced that he was choosing not to continue. In the tenth round of his 2004 fight with Diego Corrales, Freitas told the referee, after a knockdown, that he didn't want to fight on. On this night, Freitas chose the same route, and while I am loathe to criticize men who show the bravery and athleticism that I couldn't muster, his legacy is now diminished irreparably.

Freitas actually threw more punches in the bout (627 to 585), while the Baby Bull landed more (222 to 159).

In the first, Freitas was on the defensive, as the 23-year-old Diaz (32-0, 16 KOs), who turned pro at 16, looked to press the action from the start. Freitas (38-2), though, was no shrinking violet, as he looked to dig in with left hooks to the body. The work rate was strong, and the crowd hooted in appreciation.

Freitas' legs looked spry in the second, and Diaz didn't find it easy to find his target. But there's a reason Diaz is one of boxing's best young bangers--he's ruthless in his desire to track a foe down, and toss leather.

The third round saw Freitas, in only his third fight in three years, come out with a fierce left hook to the body. At this point, one wondered, will Freitas' legs continue to cooperate with him? Diaz mixed his shots nicely, varying his throws, a left hook here, a jab there. Diaz began to close the distance some by the end of the third, and the two traded to close the chapter. Again, the crowd made it clear they felt they were getting their money's worth.

Harold Lederman had it 29-28 after the third.

On to the fourth. Diaz pressed forward, and we all know that judges typically don't favor the man moving in retreat, even if he's effective. Freitas was effective, working off the ropes. To this point, Freitas didn't look like the aged athlete, having a rough time matching energy levels with his younger counterpart. Again, both fighters threw caution to the wind to try and lock down the round. Ronnie Shields counseled Diaz to use the jab more, and Freitas' trainer told him to work

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hard inside, using short throws.

In the fifth round, Freitas still looked fresh. That is, until he got caught on the ropes and was hurt by five solid blows. Diaz followed up as Freitas' hands were at his waist. He managed to exit the round, but how much longer could Freitas hold on? The hurtful combo started with a jab that sent Freitas back, and another jab buzzed the Brazilian. On the ropes, Diaz cuffed him with hooks, and Freitas hugged for dear life. Diaz stalked him hurriedly and Freitas slipped well enough to stay afloat. Diaz knocked him into the ropes again, and the crowd sensed a stoppage, but again, Freitas kept his wits about him, and slipped dangerous strikes.

The sixth round saw Freitas perk up. But Diaz isn't one to let up on the gas--he's a workhorse, a marathon runner in the ring, rather than a sprinter. Freitas threw some meaningful punches, and the fans felt he'd stick around for a spell.

Diaz landed a solid left to open Freitas' eyes to open the seventh. By now, Freitas legs were far less active. The two danced in center ring and traded off. Freitas touched Diaz with a left uppercut and then Diaz roared back with his own left. Freitas closed out the round with short shots that landed, as Diaz chose to load up more, and put more mustard on his offerings.

In the eighth, Diaz showed a tendency to lean over, and offer his head on a platter. But he was always throwing, so Freitas wasn't able to exploit that weakness. Diaz' jab was pesky, a persistent annoyance that kept Freitas from working. Diaz had Freitas in precarious position late in the round, and after the round, Freitas' trainer told him, "The fight is not over." Au contraire. Freitas said no more, I can't do it anymore. He had, once again, done a Duran.

Afterwards, Diaz said he was never hurt. He said he'd like to fight any other lightweight champions, and Max Kellerman said that Joel Casamayor is the man to beat. For my money, Diaz is the man, not the 35-year-old Cuban, is the present and past stud of the division. A fight with Manny Pacquiao, it turns out, is what Diaz is really craving. "That would be the fight of my dreams," he said. "Thank you from all boxing fans for a great night," Kellerman said. Freitas, Bob Papa informed viewers, declined to be interviewed.

He'll have plenty of time to mull over what he could have said. Really, what was there to say? His actions spoke a thousand times louder than any rationalization could've.